

Don't let the urgent crowd out the important – Are you still making good decisions?

May 2020

Covid-19 has thrown up a lot of issues and a lot of urgent decisions have been made. But other things will have been forgotten.

Is it now time to start thinking about the important as much as the urgent?

By and large trustees have dealt with the current circumstances well; some becoming quite tech-savvy in the process! However, as time passes, some of the less immediately obvious challenges start to appear. What should the Trustee Chair and the other trustees do to make effective decisions?

What is working well?

Trustees are all in this together and many will have realised what it really means to be a trustee. Having virtual meetings has been a godsend for many – you can meet more readily, more frequently without spending hours travelling! You can see and hear each other, and the shorter online meetings have provoked greater focus and attention to what really matters. But present circumstances will have made you think about the role of the trustee board, the role of the committees, the role of trustee support and will have highlighted for all the need to understand what everyone is doing and where the gaps are.

What needs to work better?

Leading and chairing a virtual meeting is much more difficult. And there will have been unexpected absences among the trustees and support either due to furloughing or illness and, for some tragically, death. Making decisions is also more difficult when behavioural clues are less obvious or when trustees are more worried about their day jobs than their trustee responsibilities.

Here is a list of 8 key things you can do to facilitate good decision making:

- 1) Remind yourself of the key goals feeding into your primary duty to pay the right amount of money to the right people at the right time. Is what you are doing still relevant?
- 2) Trustee chairs: take time to arrange informal chats with your fellow trustees – easy to forget when no longer meeting face-to-face. And allow some off-piste discussion in your virtual meetings to help with team bonding;
- 3) Make sure you have succession planning/ alternates in place for all key roles (including risk control owners!);
- 4) Record all meetings whether formal or informal – you might need it;
- 5) Rehearse upcoming key decisions so that you are prepared (e.g. financial difficulties);
- 6) Pennywise pound foolish? Take the advice you need to make the right decisions for your members;
- 7) Re-determine what is important to you; what has been appreciated and done well so that you can ensure they remain in your new way of working;
- 8) Plan to succeed – make sure you can still execute your decisions with your trustee support and advisers/ providers, in the timeframes you require.

“When the lockdown subsides, don't bounce back, bounce forward!”